THE RISE OF THE MONARCHICAL EPISCOPATE

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It is generally recognized that by the time of Irenaeus (*ca.* A.D. 185) the monarchical episcopate with its threefold ministry of bishop (ἐπίσκοπος) elders (πρεσβύτεροι) and deacons (διάκονοι) had well-nigh universally replaced what is often considered an earlier organizational pattern of a twofold ministry of bishops or elders (that is, bishops-elders) and deacons. [1] The question of how and when the monarchical episcopate developed has occasioned much discussion, some of which has been based more on modern theological concepts than on a careful consideration of the ancient historical sources. Though in some quarters the matter appears still to be a rather live issue, [2] discussion seems for the most part

[1] The earliest evidence for the latter pattern is to be found in some NT references we shall notice shortly. Here a word about terminology is in order: In harmony with standard practice, "monarchical episcopate," "monepiscopacy," and "threefold ministry" will be used synonymously for that type of church organization where on a local level one individual, usually designated the bishop, is in charge of the church (assisted by elders and deacons); and "presbyterial organization," "twofold ministry," etc., will be used synonymously to refer to the type of local organization where a board of elders (or bishop-elders) has charge (assisted by deacons). The method of appointment or election is not a consideration in this usage, but the *fact* of such appointment or election for service on a *local level* is. It is recognized, of course, that our sources at times use the term "elders" to mean "older men," as well as in this more restricted way. It is also recognized that the terms "elder" and "bishop" are used interchangeably by sources at the end of our period (the time of Irenaeus) as well as at the beginning (the NT epoch). Note, *e.g.*, Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, iii. 3. 3, in comparison with a letter by him quoted in Eusebius, *H.E.*, v. 24. 14-17; also cf. *Adv. Haer.*, iv. 26. 5, and Clement of Alexandria, *Quis dives*, 42.

[2] One cannot but think of the stir created by a work produced under the direction of K. E. Kirk, *The Apostolic Ministry: Essays on*

to have settled down to a relatively calm and intelligent inquiry concerning the testimony of the original sources and possible reasons for the rise of the monarchical episcopate. Such lack as still remains would seem to be attributable to no dearth nor incompetence in scholarly investigation along these lines, but rather to failure to look at the results in sufficient breadth to allow combination and synthesis of them into a coherent general pattern of development consistent with historical backgrounds, antecedents and circumstances of the time. [3]

The present short article does not propose to undertake the herculean task of detailed reconstruction, but would simply sketch in very brief and broad outline a tentative general pattern of historical development which seems to be evident from the ancient sources. Our main attention will be devoted to those sources contemporary (or the most nearly contemporary) with the developments themselves, rather than to later ancient sources or the opinions of modern scholarship. Nevertheless, it may be well first, by way of

the History and the Doctrine of Episcopacy (New York, 1946). For some interesting and competent responses see, *e.g.*, T. W. Manson, *The Church's Ministry* (Philadelphia, 1948), and Arnold Ehrhardt, *The Apostolic Succession in the First Two Centuries of the Church* (London, 1953).

[3] It seems surprising that so little effort has been made toward broad correlation, but perhaps among the reasons are oversimplification on the one hand (evidence tailored to fit one particular mold needs no broad correlation) and awareness of the great complexity of the organizational situation in the early church on the other hand (such might tend to focus attention on detail, to the neglect of efforts at wide synthesis). One cannot but admire the serious, and in many ways helpful, treatment of B. H. Streeter, *The Primitive Church Studied with Special Reference to the Origins of the Christian Ministry* (New York, 1929), although issue must often be taken with both his methodology and his results. A much shorter, but useful, survey has been provided by John Knox in a work cited in note 7, below. Whereas Streeter sees monepiscopacy emerging as part of a process of standardization from diverse backgrounds, Knox considers it a pattern spreading from Jerusalem to Syria and westward, as had also been the case with the earlier presbyterial organizational form.

introduction, to sketch a few of the trends noticeable in modern study of the subject. Having done this, we will turn next to an elucidation of the general pattern of historical development and then to a brief analysis of the situation in the light of historical backgrounds and antecedents of the times.

I

Modern investigation of the rise of the monarchical episcopate seems to have produced, by and large, two main theories of historical development—that the single-bishop system arose through direct apostolic appointment, on the one hand, or that it was an outgrowth of presbyterial organization, on the other hand.[4] Though one or the other of these hypotheses has frequently taken prominence, especially in the earlier discussions of the subject, various refinements as well as new approaches have been forthcoming. It has become evident, for example, that the two viewpoints are not necessarily mutually exclusive.[5] Also, increasing

[4] The former being the Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, and High Anglican view; and the latter, that espoused by Protestants generally. Philip Schaff gives fairly comprehensive lists of the arguments used on both sides. See his *A History of the Christian Church* (5th ed.; New York, 1910), II, 135-141. An outstanding early exposition of the latter view which is so significant as to deserve special mention is J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Philippians* (reprint of 12th ed.; London, 1927), pp. 181-269.

[5] So, *e.g.*, in the case of Schaff, *op. cit.*, II, 141: "The only satisfactory conclusion . . . seems to be, that the episcopate proceeded, both in the descending and ascending scale, from the apostolate and the original presbyterate conjointly, as a contraction of the former and an expansion of the latter, without either express concert or general regulation of the apostles, neither of which, at least, can be historically proved." Edwin Hatch and Adolph Harnack produced a modified form of the theory of outgrowth from presbyterial organization. According to this, bishops in the earliest period were not identical with elders, but might be included among them. In the development of monepiscopacy these scholars lay stress, respectively, on the aspects of financial administration and worship. See Hatch, *The Organization of the Early Christian Church* (4th ed.; London, 1892), and Harnack, *The Constitution and Law of the Church in the First Two Centuries*

attention has been given to the possible role of the "charismatic" ministries (prophets, teachers, and the like) in the general development. [6] Of interest are some recent studies which would see a gradual formalization wherein ministerial functions (emphasis on *functions* rather than classes or offices of ministry) were through redefinement transformed into the monepiscopal system; thus, from a situation where there was probably originally a rather fluid interchange in performance of services ("bishop" and "deacon," for example, being but designations of cultual services which could be performed interchangeably by the same individuals) there gradually emerged the more stereotyped system wherein the fullness of ministerial functions became attached to the pastor (bishop), assisted by administrative and cultual helpers (elders and deacons, respectively). [7] Another group of recent studies has approached the matter by utilizing a classification of "essential" and "derived" ministries. [8]

Analogies drawn from a study of missions have provided still further grounds for re-assessment and have produced

(London, 1910). Harnack has also provided useful synopses in his *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries* (2d ed.; London, 1908), I, 431-482, and in an article, "Organization of the Early Church," in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, VIII, 259-267.

[6] The *Didache*, published by Bryennios in 1883, ten years after its discovery in a Greek MS at Constantinople, stimulated interest in this direction. For examples of various types of attention along this line, cf. Harnack, Streeter, and more recently John Knox (see the citation in note 7, below).

[7] See especially the first two chapters in H. Richard Niebuhr and Daniel D. Williams, eds., *The Ministry in Historical Perspectives* (New York, 1956): John Knox, "The Ministry in the Primitive Church," pp. 1-26; and George H. Williams, "The Ministry of the Ante-Nicene Church (*c.* 125-325)," pp. 27-59. These studies classify the ministry of the NT period into a threefold pattern of charismatic, cultual and disciplinary.

[8] Kirk, *op. cit.* The following chapters are of particular interest: Kirk, "The Apostolic Ministry," pp. 1-52; A. M. Farrer, "The Ministry in the New Testament," pp. 113-182; and Dom Gregory Dix, "The Ministry in the Early Church," pp. 183-303.

some intriguing new departures. [9] A rather interesting reconstruction from the episcopal point of view would see a distinction between single-bishop and plural-bishop areas, the former having plenary autonomy and the latter being still in a state of dependence on the apostolate itself or on areas where the autonomous episcopate had been instituted. [10]

In connection with the foregoing and other reconstructions various causes or reasons for the rise and spread of the monarchical episcopate have been suggested, among them the following: a natural tendency toward concentration of authority with growth, increasing need for full-time pastoral care, desirability for having locally a central spokesman for the congregation with relationship both to internal affairs and to outside contacts, the administration of church finance, leadership in worship (especially in connection with the Eucharist), spread of the concept of a sacrificing high priest and a priestly succession, decline of spiritual gifts, and the very real need for consolidation in the face of persecution and assault from heretical movements. [11] In addition there are the rather mutually exclusive ideas of a divinely preordained organizational scheme implemented through apostolic agency and of a natural tendency for the chairman of a board of elders to develop from a *primus inter pares* into a *primus absolutus*. [12]

[9] Notice in particular the emphasis in Manson, *op. cit.*, pp. 36, 37, 64, 65. Cf. also H. E. Symonds, *The Church Universal and the See of Rome* (London, 1939), pp. 17, 18.

[10] Philip Carrington, *The Early Christian Church* (Cambridge, Engl., 1957), I, 472, 473.

[11] Most of these suggestions recur repeatedly, being taken up by one investigator after another, though with varying emphasis. For a fairly comprehensive listing, see Schaff, *op. cit.*, II, 141-143. For notation of special emphases by Hatch and Harnack, cf. note 5, above.

[12] These, it will be seen, are broadly (but not exactly) correlative to the two basic theories of historical development mentioned at the beginning of the present section of our study. We might add to our list the somewhat secondary idea suggested by various writers that a strong personality would naturally tend to gravitate into the position of chief responsibility.

Some scholars treating the subject list possible causes quite separately from their analyses of the ancient sources; others, especially those presenting detailed reconstructions, attempt some correlation, at least within a limited range. But however this may be, the manifold and varied studies which have been presented on the rise of monepiscopacy help us toward recognition of an important fact; namely, that great complexity must have existed in connection with this facet of early church history. They warn us against seeking easy solutions by indicating, for example, that although organization may have been relatively simple in any given church at a given time, a great many factors must have been operative with varying influence from place to place and time to time.

Nevertheless, the very process of closely scrutinizing details, necessary as this is in providing materials for solid reconstruction and serviceable as it is in teaching us caution, may possibly cause failure to notice broader patterns and correlations that actually exist. [13] In any event, it is well at times to step away from the individual pieces to take a look at the whole picture, even though it be but with a fleeting glance. In the remainder of this study, it is our purpose to take just such a "fleeting glance" at a relatively large picture—a picture which will be limited somewhat, however, by directing our attention specifically to the twofold and threefold types of ministry and by placing main emphasis on the period when the latter first comes to view. Thus the so-called general and charismatic ministries (apostles, prophets, and the like) will be omitted from discussion (except in such incidental way as may have direct bearing on our main question); and the diocesan episcopate also lies beyond the scope of our treatment.

Before proceeding it may be useful to make one further basic observation regarding the early monarchical episcopate; namely, that the form of church government indicated by it was originally probably not far different from what we envisage when we think of a modern local congregation

[13] Cf. note 3, above.

having pastor, board of elders, and deacons. [14] Therefore to read back into it the more highly developed episcopal form of a later time is undoubtedly methodologically unsound.

II

It is here suggested that an analysis of the earliest Christian literature brings to attention a pattern which not only indicates the general time and direction of the rise of the monarchical episcopate but also hints at one of the main causative factors in that rise. Moreover, as we proceed, we will find that this pattern is compatible with certain historical backgrounds, antecedents and trends.

The earliest evidence bearing directly on our question is provided by Luke and Paul. References in the Book of Acts and in the Epistle to the Philippians indicate that in southern Asia Minor, [15] at Ephesus [16] and at Philippi [17] there was quite early a twofold rather than threefold ministry, with the terms "bishops" and "elders" apparently being used interchangeably (at least at Ephesus). The pastoral letters seem to give a similar picture, [18] though in them there might also be some indication of background for monepiscopacy in the fact that Timothy and Titus appear to hold a jurisdiction and authority above that of the local elders or bishops. [19] Near the end of the first century, Clement of Rome and Hermas

[14] This thought has frequently been pointed out in one way or another. See, *e.g.*, Robert Rainy, *The Ancient Catholic Church* (New York, 1902), pp. 35, 38; Robert E. Thompson, *The Historic Episcopate* (Philadelphia, 1910), p. 100; F. J. Foakes-Jackson, *Studies in the Life of the Early Church* (New York, 1924), p. 156; Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 28; and F. F. Bruce, *The Spreading Flame* (London, 1958), p. 205. Cf. also Schaff, *op. cit.*, II, 144, 148.

[15] Acts 14 : 23. [16] Acts 20 : 17, 28. [17] Php 1 : 1.

[18] See 1 Tim 3 : 1-13; 5 : 17; and especially Tit 1 : 5, 7, where the terminology of bishop and elder seems to be used interchangeably (also the case in Acts 20 : 17, 28).

[19] See especially Tit 1 : 5, 6. Of course, a basic question would be whether we have here the real beginning of (or even background for) a permanent local settled ministry, or merely a continuation of the apostolic itinerary form carried on through apostolic deputies.

indicate that there was as yet no monepiscopacy in Corinth and Rome;[20] but the Book of Revelation, in a glimpse it gives of the province of Asia, would seem to imply that the single-bishop system may already have come into existence there (that is, if we can see such significance in the apocalyptic symbol "the angel"—always singular—used in addressing each of the seven churches).[21]

Our next clear evidence comes from Ignatius of Antioch. From a series of seven letters[22] he penned *ca.* A.D. 115 while on his journey to martyrdom in Rome, we secure the following picture: monepiscopacy in the province of Asia (reflected in his letters to the Ephesians, Magnesians, Trallians, Philadelphians, Smyrnaeans and Polycarp);[23] the same type of

[20] See especially 1 Clem 42 : 4, 5; 44 : 1-5; 47 : 6; 54 : 2; 57 : 1; and Hermas, *Vis.* ii. 4. 3; iii. 1. 8. The material in Hermas, from *Vis.* v onward (that vision plus the twelve Commands and ten Parables, sometimes designated as the *Shepherd* proper) may be of a date later than the first century, though E. J. Goodspeed in *The Apostolic Fathers: An American Translation* (New York, 1950), p. 98, speaks of it as appearing only three or four years after the first portion. Streeter, *op. cit.*, pp. 196, 209-219, would allow a lapse of somewhat over a decade, and Carrington, *op. cit.*, I, 392, 393, sees the possibility of Hermas' ministry lasting until A.D. 140, at which time he may have prepared a final edition of his writings. Part of the problem in dating relates to the amount of credence which should be given to a statement in the *Muratorian Canon* to the effect that the *Shepherd* was written by Hermas while "his brother Pius, the bishop" occupied the chair of the Roman church. In view of doubts regarding date, we have suggested only references from the first section as pertinent evidence for the period with which we are now dealing, though nothing in the second section would, in any event, alter the picture of organization we have given. Undoubtedly the main relevant reference in the latter section is *Sim.* ix. 26, 27, dealing at length with "deacons" and then "bishops."

[21] Rev 2 : 1, 8, 12, 18; 3 : 1, 7, 14. In another context 24 elders are mentioned. See 4 : 4, 10; 5 : 8, 11. The evidence so confidently adduced by Streeter, *op. cit.*, pp. 87-92, 95, regarding the Diotrephes of 3 Jn is highly debatable. See especially C. H. Dodd, *The Johannine Epistles* (London, 1946), pp. 161-164.

[22] For brief up-to-date information concerning recensions of the Ignatian letters, see the citations in note 32, below.

[23] These letters literally abound with references. See, *e.g.*, Eph 2 : 2; 3 : 2; 4 : 1; 5 : 3; 6 : 1; Magn 3 : 1; 6 : 1; 7 : 1; Trall 2 : 2;

organization in his home church of Antioch; [24] but no awareness of monepiscopacy in Rome. The silence of his letter to the Romans in this matter is all the more striking when placed in contrast with his urgent and repeated emphasis on the bishop and the threefold ministry in all the other six letters. [25] Polycarp of Smyrna, in writing to the church at Philippi a short time later, leaves us with the impression that a twofold, rather than threefold, ministry was still the pattern there. [26]

Not many decades later, however, the picture had changed to one of a threefold ministry quite generally throughout Christendom. Irenaeus, as we have already noted, furnishes evidence of this, and we might add that somewhat before the time of his writing, Bishop Dionysius of Corinth had

3 : 1; 7 : 2; 12 : 2; 13 : 2; Phld 7 : 1, 2; 10 : 2; Smyrn 8 : 1, 2; 9 : 1; 12 : 2; Polyc 6 : 1. There are also many others.

[24] *E.g.*, he refers to himself as "bishop of Syria" in Rom 2 : 2.

[25] Streeter, *op. cit.*, pp. 179, 180, 229, 233-235, has provided an explanation which is more ingenious than convincing. It may be summarized as follows: Ignatius was a "neurotic" sort of individual obsessed with the idea of episcopacy. This being the case, and Ignatius certainly not being totally ignorant of church organization in Rome, there must have been in the Roman church something of the nature of monepiscopacy—a person who, regardless of his powers in relationship to the other elders in his own church, was at least its official head in dealings with other churches. Ignatius thus believed that the Roman church was a model in regard to the type of organization he had "on the brain" (one of the expressions used by Streeter). Upon reaching Rome, however, Ignatius must soon have become disillusioned as he found that the centralized authority of the bishop did not measure up to his expectations. In that moment of emotional crisis his *idée fixe* would have got the better of him and would have brought forth a prophetic utterance similar to the one he had spoken in Philadelphia, "Give heed to the bishop and the presbytery and deacons" (Phld 7 : 1). His words, falling on receptive ears, would have influenced the Roman church into a new era of emphasis on the bishop's unique position.

[26] See his letter to the Philippians. Note the complete context, but see especially 5 : 2; 6 : 1; 11 : 1. P. N. Harrison, *Polycarp's Two Epistles to the Philippians* (Cambridge, Engl., 1936), has argued for a later date for chaps. 1-12 than for 13 and possibly 14; but even should he be correct, we would simply have to defer still further the *terminus non ante quem* for establishment of monepiscopacy in Philippi.

ca. A.D. 170 referred to Soter as Bishop of Rome.[27] Justin Martyr still earlier, about the middle of the century, seems to have had the same pattern of organization in mind with respect to Rome.[28] Just how early the monarchical episcopate was established there remains a matter of some conjecture because of the lack of sufficient clear contemporary records, but somewhere from the time of Sixtus (*ca.* 115-*ca.* 125) to that of Pius (*ca.* 140-*ca.* 155) would seem to be the most likely period.[29]

It will undoubtedly have become apparent from the foregoing that the developments which we have endeavored to sketch deserve attention from geographical as well as chronological perspective. If we have rightly understood our sources, it would seem that the region east of the Aegean

[27] From a letter quoted by Eusebius, *H.E.*, iv. 23. 10.

[28] He refers, *e.g.*, to president and deacons (see *Apol.* i. 65, 67). He does not use the term *episcopos*, but it seems quite evident that he has that office in mind. His failure to mention presbyters probably arises from the cultual context of the statements.

[29] Justin undoubtedly wrote his *Apology* (the so-called second Apology is a supplement to the first) during the time of Pius. Harnack, on the basis of the succession lists, has suggested that monepiscopacy in Rome did not originate until A.D. 150 (see *Schaff-Herzog*, VIII, 264), again the time of Pius. Pius' successor Anicetus (*ca.* 155-166) has been treated as a bishop by Irenaeus (cf., *e.g.*, the letter quoted in Eusebius, *H.E.*, v. 24), a source sufficiently close to have been able to speak intelligently and fairly authoritatively on the matter; and we have already noticed that Soter, Anicetus' successor, was spoken of as Roman bishop by Dionysius of Corinth. Moreover, the *Muratorian Canon*, in a statement referred to in note 20, above, speaks of "Pius, the bishop" occupying the "chair of the church" in Rome. Some sources, such as the *Muratorian Canon*, must, of course, be treated with caution, but the combined weight of the foregoing and perhaps other factors (as, for instance, a disputed election) would seem to make the time of Pius the *terminus non post quem* for the rise of monepiscopacy in Rome. Some scholars, such as Streeter, would date full-fledged development of the monarchical episcopate somewhat earlier, to the time of Sixtus (see the summary of Streeter's position on this matter in note 25, above). Of course, it is possible on the basis of later tradition to trace an episcopal succession right back to Peter, but the contemporary documents lend no support to this sort of reconstruction.

had the threefold ministry somewhat earlier than did the Greek and Roman regions to the west. [30] The Book of Revelation and especially Ignatius would, for example, appear to provide us with a picture of monepiscopal organization in the province of Asia at a time when such does not appear to have been in existence in Greece and Italy.

Inasmuch as Ignatius is so crucial a figure in the history of monepiscopal development, two further observations regarding him will be in order. First, an earlier tendency to expunge or dismiss his testimony as interpolation has lost ground, [31] and it has become evident that the middle or seven-letter recension [32] of his work is very likely basically genuine. [33]

[30] In the context of this study "East" refers primarily to the Roman province of Asia and to the Syrian region of Antioch and its environs, and "West" to Greece, Macedonia, and especially Rome. Certain areas, such as Alexandria and the Roman province of Africa (in both of which places information on the church appears only toward the end of the second century), are omitted from discussion. Jerusalem holds the unique position of "home base" rather than "mission territory" and attracts our attention only as such.

[31] The argument by some scholars of an earlier generation that the Ignatian attacks on heresy are anachronistic and therefore must indicate interpolation is no longer tenable now that it is known that docetism of some sort was prevalent much earlier than was once supposed. The Ignatian references to monepiscopacy are likewise being treated with more respect today, and it has become increasingly difficult to find scholars who endeavor to disprove Ignatius by placing him in opposition to Clement of Rome, Hermas, Polycarp, the *Didache* and other sources (as was the tendency, for instance, of Thompson, *op. cit.*, pp. 75, 76, 89, 90, as well as certain other scholars). Perhaps the aversion on the part of some to the idea of an early monarchical episcopate has arisen from a misunderstanding of the nature of that office. Cf. the remarks made at the close of Section I of the present study, and see also the statements by authorities cited in note 14.

[32] For a brief, excellent discussion of the recensions, see Fritz Guy, "'The Lord's Day' in the Letter of Ignatius to the Magnesians," *AUSS*, II (1964), 2-6. See also Virginia Corwin, *St. Ignatius and Christianity in Antioch* (New Haven, Conn., 1960), pp. 3-14, for information on the history of discussion of the Ignatian literature.

[33] Never a truly convincing theory, the idea that the three-letter recension represents the earliest and most genuine form of the epistles has few adherents left, although the late Walter E. Straw, *The Origin of Sunday Observance in the Christian Church* (Washington, D.C.,

To those who would still view the stress on the monarchical episcopate in this recension as being later interpolatory work of Roman episcopacy, it should be sufficient to point out that the Roman letter, the very one wherein we might, according to this hypothesis, expect the greatest emphasis on the episcopate, is the very one which entirely lacks such an emphasis! Second, although there is today greater respect for the authenticity of the Ignatian references to monepiscopacy, there has been a tendency to view them as overemphasis by a neurotic type of individual [34] or to interpret their urgency as evidence that the monarchical episcopate was very recent and not as yet firmly established. [35] The

1939), pp. 107-118, has endeavored to make a strong case for it. The difficulty is that in spite of all of Straw's assertions regarding monepiscopacy's not being reflected in the three-letter recension, a careful comparative analysis of this recension and the middle recension will reveal that for the amount of material given in each (excluding the epistle to the Romans which mentions "bishop" only in regard to Ignatius himself), the number of references indicative of monepiscopacy is proportionately about the same. (Any apparent contradiction to this from statistics given by Schaff, *op. cit.*, II, 145, n. 2, will be resolved when it is realized that not only are entire letters lacking in the Syriac recension, but that also the letters which are present have been shortened.) Straw himself, remarkably enough, quotes from the Syriac letter of Ignatius to Polycarp, 6 : 1, "My soul be for theirs that are submissive to the bishop, to the presbytery, and to the deacons," but still can go on to conclude that in this recension there is "no distinction between bishops and presbyters"! (See p. 114 in his book.)

[34] So Streeter. See note 25, above.

[35] This view appears to lie in the background of the thinking of a number of scholars. Cf., *e.g.*, Manson, *op. cit.*, p. 73, and Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 205. Schaff, *op. cit.*, II, 148, refers to the possibility of explaining the matter in two ways: "Such daring superabundance of episcopalianism clearly betrays some special design and raises the suspicion of forgery or large interpolations. But it may also be explained as a special pleading for a novelty which to the mind of the writer was essential to the very existence of the church." On the other hand, J. W. C. Wand, *A History of the Early Church to A.D.* 500 (3d ed.; London, 1949), p. 29, sees the Ignatian emphasis more as an effort "to persuade the faithful to rally round an old and tried institution than an attempt to foist upon them something new."

difficulty with such views is that they fail to give sufficient weight to the most obvious reason for the Ignatian emphasis on monepiscopacy as attested in the Ignatian letters themselves; namely, the danger of divisive tendencies created by the prevalence of heresies.[36] The whole Ignatian reference to church organization is set in the context of appeals to unity,[37] and any over-emphasis on organization is much more understandable in this context than as being simply fanatical zeal on the part of a bishop overly enchanted with the idea of monepiscopacy *per se*.

In view of what has just been said, it will be of interest to review the literature once more to see if any further correlation between monepiscopal organization and the prevalence of heresies can be detected. In such a survey, we are immediately impressed with the fact that the New Testament writings also give evidence of dangers from heresies in precisely those areas just east of the Aegean where we find our earliest contemporary information regarding the existence of monepiscopacy. It is in that region, for example, that Paul's letter to the Colossians and the pastoral epistles to Timothy, with their apparently anti-gnostic reflections,[38] have application; and it is also there that the Johannine literature, with its strong anti-docetism,[39] originated. By way of contrast, neither the New Testament literature nor the earliest church fathers depict similar problems in the West. In Corinth there

[36] The Ignatian attack on heresy has long been recognized, though an earlier generation of scholars found in this respect, too, an evidence of interpolation, as we have already noted (cf. note 31, above). For a careful analysis of the data regarding the heresies combated by Ignatius, see Cyril C. Richardson, *The Christianity of Ignatius of Antioch* (New York, 1935), pp. 51-54, 79-85. Cf. also Corwin, *op. cit.*, pp. 52-65, and see note 44, below.

[37] Richardson, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-39, has a valuable section on the Ignatian viewpoint on unity. Pertinent also are his comments on p. 3.

[38] See, *e.g.*, Col 2 : 8, 9, 18; 1 Tim 1 : 4; 4 : 1-3, 7; 6 : 20, 21. Cf. also 2 Tim 2 : 14-18; 4 : 3, 4.

[39] See especially 1 Jn 4 : 1-3.

may indeed be internal dissension, [40] but it hardly fits the pattern of the trouble in Asia. [41]

Returning to Ignatius once again, we may add that the main heresy he combats is docetism, [42] and thus he furnishes in this respect an interesting parallel to the Johannine literature. Moreover, though Ignatius reflects awareness of this heresy in all his letters addressed to Asian churches, [43] plus possibly another heresy in some of those letters, [44] he

[40] Particularly evidenced in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians and in 1 Clement, where internal factions and the ejection of church officers are pictured.

[41] The same would appear to be true in Philippi at the time of Polycarp, though it is possible that some of the heretical movements prevalent in Asia were troubling the Philippian church by this time. In any event, one of the problems at Philippi was concerning an elder who had "misunderstood" his position (see *Polycarp to the Philippians* 11 : 1), whereas the appeal in the Ignatian corpus is for loyalty to the constituted church authorities.

[42] Note, *e.g.*, Eph 7 : 2; 20 : 2; Magn 11 : 1; Trall 9 : 1; 10; Phld 3 : 3; 5 : 1; Smyrn 1 : 1, 2; 2 : 1; 3 : 1-3; 4 : 2; 5 : 2, 3; Polyc 3 : 1, 2.

[43] The references in Ephesians, Trallians and Smyrnaeans are especially striking. Cf. note 44, below, regarding the possibility of there being no anti-docetic reference in Magnesians. There is only minimal allusion in Polycarp (see 3 : 1, 2) but this would be natural. The saintly bishop of Smyrna did not need warning about heresy nor an appeal to unity. In fact, he may even have been influential in bringing about Ignatius' writing of some of the letters addressed to Asian churches, a suggestion made by Goodspeed, *A History of Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, 1942), pp. 22, 27, 28.

[44] The epistles to the Magnesians and Philadelphians. Richardson, *op. cit.*, pp. 79-85, argues that two heresies—a sort of Judaizing as well as the docetism—are reflected in the Ignatian warnings. Corwin, *op. cit.*, pp. 52-65, also sees these two heresies reflected, but would treat the only apparently anti-docetic reference in Magnesians (11 : 1) as being anti-Judaistic instead. Furthermore, she applies the Ignatian testimony as evidence that back home in Antioch Ignatius had represented a center party in the church with extreme parties existing on each side. Interesting as this reconstruction is, it is difficult to feel secure concerning the degree to which material ostensibly pertaining to Asia has been utilized to depict conditions in Antioch (even granting that Ignatius must have had his own background experience in mind as he penned his letters). Moreover, it seems doubtful that the anti-heretical attacks by Ignatius envisage little more than the fruition, as it were, of docetic and Judaistic tendencies already in

shows no awareness of a like danger in Rome. [45] This, of course, parallels precisely his pattern of emphasis on monepiscopacy!

But Ignatius, as we have seen, also gives evidence of the existence of monepiscopacy in Antioch. Had heresy posed a threat to the church there by or during Ignatius' time? As is well known, that area had become a hot-bed of Menandrian, Satornilian and other heresies. [46]

Turning our attention again to Rome, we may notice that it was not until the second quarter of the second century that the real thrust of major heretical movements descended upon that city. It was evidently during the time of Hyginus (*ca.* 136-*ca.* 140) and Pius (*ca.* 140-*ca.* 155) that the Cerdoic, Marcionite and Valentinian heresies made their real impact felt in Rome. [47] Again we are dealing with the very period when monepiscopacy most likely originated there.

existence in the church. Rather, the whole tenor of the Ignatian material would seem to indicate urgent need for unity in view of divisions taking place because of dangerous external heretical forces impinging upon, and making inroads into, the church.

The whole question of the heresies involved, it must be added, is in reality far from settled. Corwin's presentation of evidence for the Jewish-type heresy being of Essenic variety sheds refreshing new light on the matter (see *op. cit.*, pp. 61-63, 72-79). The kind of docetism involved is unclear, but it is generally assumed to have been of a form earlier than that connected with the major gnostic heresies. On the other hand, we cannot dismiss the apparently anti-gnostic reflections of the pastoral epistles to Timothy nor the tradition regarding Polycarp's statement about the Apostle John's meeting Cerinthus, the gnostic, in Ephesus (see Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, iii. 3. 4).

[45] There is silence on this matter in the Roman letter.

[46] Our chief information comes from Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, i. 23. 1-5 and 24. 1, 2; from Hippolytus, *Philos.*, vii. 16; and from Justin Martyr, who also refers to Simon Magus in *Apol.* i. 26. Convenient collections of the main sources may be found in R. M. Grant, *Gnosticism: A Source Book of Heretical Writings from the Early Christian Period* (New York, 1961), pp. 30-32, and J. C. Ayer, *A Source Book for Ancient Church History from the Apostolic Age to the Close of the Conciliar Period* (New York, 1913), pp. 81, 106. Unfortunately, the main material on Satornilos has not been included in Ayer.

[47] Our chief sources on the major heresies (Gnostic and Marcionite) are Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Origen

Thus a study of the emergence and spread of the docetic and gnostic heresies yields a pattern of distribution so closely parallel to that which is indicated for the rise of the monarchical episcopate that the coincidences can hardly be accidental. It would indeed appear that the struggle of the church with heresy was one of the major reasons why monepiscopal organization developed when, where and as it did—first in the East and then in the West.

It is perhaps pertinent to add that the foregoing pattern possibly sheds light on a later tradition (and is, in turn, illuminated by that tradition) to the effect that, as stated by Tertullian, "the order of bishops" when traced to its origin "will rest on John as author" (Tertullian seems to have had in mind the "order" in Asia rather than in general, for in the context he speaks of John's "*alumnas ecclesias*"). [48] The story told by Clement of Alexandria regarding John and the bandit may have bearing here too. [49]

III

Another aspect of the situation which deserves at least brief mention is the matter of backgrounds or antecedents underlying the church organizational forms of early Christianity. The institutional aspects of the church, as well as other

and Epiphanius. Pertinent materials have been conveniently compiled in Ayer, *op. cit.*, pp. 88-105.

[48] *Adv. Marcion.*, iv. 5.

[49] *Quis dives*, 42. The story is about a youth whom John committed to a "bishop" he had appointed. This "elder" later relaxed his care, the youth became a bandit, and John himself set out on horseback to recover the youth. In the context, it had been mentioned that John on his return to Ephesus from Patmos visited neighboring regions, "ὅπου μὲν ἐπισκόπους καταστήσων, ὅπου δὲ ὅλας Ἐκκλησίας ἁρμόσων, ὅπου δὲ κλῆρον, ἕνα τέ τινα κληρώσων ὑπὸ τοῦ Πνεύματος σημαινομένων." (Migne ed., IX, 648.) For further reference not only to John, but to episcopal succession more generally, see also *e.g.*, Tertullian, *De Praescriptione*, 32, and Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, iii. 3. 4. Such an "apostolic succession" was considered a guarantee of truth (as against the heretics, who could trace no similar succession).

aspects, did not originate *ex nihilo* nor develop in a vacuum, but were conditioned by and adapted to already existing patterns of life and thought. In this connection it is pertinent to note that a distinction can once again be drawn between regions to the east and to the west of the Aegean.

The conceptual framework to the east was conditioned by the ideal of one-man leadership as developed from a long background of political institutions with monarchs at the head [50] and that in the Greek and Roman regions, by democratic ideals. [51] Furthermore, an attested early tendency toward monarchical episcopacy in the Jerusalem church might quite naturally be expected to have exerted its influence first on nearby regions in the East before spreading westward to Rome. [52]

Indeed, it may very well be that different church organizational forms were structured by making varied combinations of rather standard Jewish patterns with somewhat hetero-

[50] Ptolemies, Seleucids, Attalids, etc., not to go back to the Pharaohs and to the Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Hittite, Canaanite, Aramaean, Israelite and other kings. Even in the most recent history of the Jews prior to the Roman conquest of Palestine in 63 B.C. there was the Hasmonean dynasty, and on the religious side of the matter both before and after that conquest there was the office of high priesthood (a number of the Hasmonean rulers held both the secular and spiritual jurisdictions).

[51] Recognition of the early Greek democratic impulse is a commonplace and needs no comment. In view of the suggested contrast between East and West, however, one cannot but think of Callisthenes' remark to Alexander the Great on the matter of *proskunesis*; namely, that this Asiatic custom should be confined to the Asiatics! See W. W. Tarn, *Alexander the Great* (Boston, 1956), p. 80. Rome's democratic ideals and political contributions are also well known, but a few pertinent items will be noted shortly because of their possible significance in influencing the pattern of church organizational development in Rome.

[52] Among scholars who have analyzed this tendency on the part of the Jerusalem church are Streeter, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-48, 76, 77, and Ehrhardt, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-30, 62-66. Symonds, *op. cit.*, pp. 10, 17, also briefly notes it, as does Knox, *op. cit.*, p. 24. Knox significantly adds that practical needs of the churches, and not simply the example of Jerusalem, dictated the rise and spread of the monarchical episcopate. Cf. also J. G. Davies, *The Early Christian Church* (New York, 1965), p. 92.

geneous local or regional patterns, and that these different forms of church organization spread concurrently in the earliest period of Christian expansion, thus contributing to the divergence we have already noted between East and West in this respect. Judaism would have furnished background for presbyterial and episcopal forms as well as for the more flexible charismatic type of ministry. All three of these forms might have found ready acceptance in the East, but the monepiscopal one may not have seemed so congenial in the West, particularly in Rome. [53] A high Roman respect for republican political institutions may, in fact, have either retarded adoption of monepiscopacy there or may have provided a substitute form.

The very Roman system of government at the time of the rise of Christianity, though it is referred to as Empire, was a form in which republican institutions were held in highest esteem. Augustus' ideal was that of principate, a continuation of the old republican forms with the added feature of a *princeps*, or first citizen, whose authority was vested with the people through constitutional principles and whose extraordinary scope of influence was due to a combination of authorities or powers already inherent in the republican functions with which he was invested. [54] A basic feature of

[53] Hatch, *op. cit.*, p. 66, voiced an opinion years ago to the effect that probably "the presbyterate in the Gentile Churches had a spontaneous and independent origin," not being transferred directly from the Jewish office to Gentile communities. Though my thinking may seem to have some kinship to his on the matter of background for church organizational forms, the real differences should be apparent. I would, *e.g.*, suggest a truly vital influence from Jewish precedents —certainly with regard to the presbyterate and also with regard to the monarchical episcopate. Of course, by the time monepiscopacy was adopted in certain places it had already had a long history as a fairly widespread Christian institution.

[54] This fact is emphasized, for example, in Augustus' famous inscription, the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* (the *Monumentum Ancyranum*). From 27 to 23 B.C. he continued to hold annual consulships (he had held them consecutively since 31 B.C.), but from 23 B.C. till his death in A.D. 14 his main sources of authority were a continuation of pro-

this Roman system was the collegiality of its magistracies, the top executive office, for example, being shared by *two* consuls. This pattern furnished background for political institutions in the municipalities, where a similar collegiality manifested itself in the election of *duoviri* (or *quattuorviri*) as chief civic officials. [55] It would not be entirely surprising if this pattern should also have provided at least some of the psychological foundation for church organizational forms—forms which may, in reality, have been fused from several elements. [56]

If indeed such be the case, an intriguing line of thought presents itself: Were the earliest elders or bishops of Rome a series of Christian "duovirs," as it were? Is it possible, for instance, that the frequent early references to both "Peter and Paul" in connection with the Roman church may have significance beyond the fact that both of these men were apostles? [57] In any event, there was undoubtedly in the Roman

consular *imperium* (in five- and ten-year grants), a *maius imperium*, and the *tribunicia potestas*. He makes clear that he not only refused the dictatorship, but also a perpetual consulship that was offered him. The text of the *Res Gestae* may be found in *CIL*, III, 769-799, and is given in English translation in Naphtali Lewis and Meyer Reinhold, eds., *Roman Civilization*, II (New York, 1955), pp. 9-19.

[55] Selections from the municipal charters of Salpensa and Malaca are provided in English translation in Lewis and Reinhold, *op. cit.*, II, 321-326. Duovirs are repeatedly mentioned or addressed in documents. Cf., *e.g.*, the first two documents presented in *ibid.*, p. 357. Quattuorvirs are addressed in a document given on p. 341. The duovirs as a rule had two junior colleagues called aediles.

[56] It would not be unreasonable to assume that basic patterns which followed Christianity from the East were conditioned in Rome by Roman backgrounds and concepts. The new patterns emerging should, obviously, not be looked upon as necessarily following their antecedents in every detail. Thus in church organization a concept deriving from the Roman idea of collegiality, if indeed there was such a concept, would not of necessity carry with it the idea of annuality.

[57] It may be that the evidence from Epiphanius (*Adv. Haer.* 27 : 6), Rufinus (Preface to *Recog. Clem.*), the so-called epistle of Clement to James (prefixed to *Hom. Clem.* [see esp. chaps. II, III, XIX]), and the *Apostolic Constitutions* (vii. 46) may tie in with such an assumption. So also the omission of Anacletus in the Roman episcopal succession

church a particularly strong tendency toward collegiate leadership during this earliest period, regardless of whether or not such leadership was dual in nature and regardless of whether it fitted the framework of the twofold or of the threefold ministry. [58]

But such collegiality must eventually have found itself unequal to the strains put upon it, just as had been the case in the Roman government. [59] Moreover, by the time the real thrust of the gnostic crisis had reached Rome, the glory of the old republican pattern was giving ground to a new sort of political image based on a supreme ruler whose status had been achieved by gradual encroachment on the old republican institutions. [60] And thus we might expect to find the monepiscopal pattern of church organization eventually developing in Rome, in response to a serious threat to church unity

list of the *Liberian Catalogue*, a list undoubtedly emanating from Rome itself. W. Ernest Beet, *The Early Roman Episcopate to A.D.* 384 (London, [1913]), pp. 60, 61, has aptly refuted the idea of a dual basis for organization of the Roman church into Pauline and Petrine parts, derived from such sources as those mentioned above; but that does not necessarily make those sources impertinent to the approach suggested here.

[58] In the conflict between Domitian and the Roman senatorial party near the end of the first century, Christians were evidently frequently endangered by their connections with members of the senatorial group, as Bo Reicke has aptly pointed out in *The Epistles of James, Peter and Jude* (Garden City, N.Y., 1964), pp. xxvii, 28. Might not this Christian leaning toward the senatorial side (as opposed to the imperial) provide a further reason why we might expect Christian polity at this time to pattern after a republican "collegiate" image rather than the imperial one?

[59] Even in the Republican era, provision had been made for a temporary (six-month) dictatorship to supersede consular authority in case of severe crisis; moreover, it was an era of serious civil wars that brought into being the Principate itself.

[60] The assemblies were the first to be eclipsed. The consulate itself went out slowly, but it cannot be doubted that by the second century, with its succession of good emperors, the consuls were undergoing a psychological as well as practical overshadowing. For brief treatment of some of the elements involved in the decline of the consulate, note Leon Homo, *Roman Political Institutions from City to State* (London, 1929), pp. 305, 313.

and at a time when the western mind had become better conditioned to accept such an organizational form.

It would appear, in view of what we have been saying, that the conflict of the church with heresy was probably one of the major *immediate* causes for adoption of monepiscopacy, in both East and West, but that important *long-range* factors were also operative, including the *background patterns* themselves. Without such background factors the immediate causes would obviously have been ineffective for producing the kind of organization they did.

IV

Before concluding this study it is fitting to give at least brief attention to one significant early source which we have thus far mentioned only in the footnotes; namely, the *Didache*. This work is usually assigned a Syrian provenance and is probably to be dated toward the end of the first century or very early in the second century.[61] The most pertinent statement from it for our inquiry is as follows:

> Therefore appoint for yourselves bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord, men who are humble and without greed and true and tried; for they also minister to you the ministry of the prophets and teachers. So despise them not, for they are your honorable men together with the prophets and teachers.[62]

This statement has often been considered as evidence of a twofold ministry, but can also be taken to indicate a threefold ministry, especially if it represents the voice of some large church, as at Antioch, giving instruction to smaller churches

[61] This early dating is not new. Cf., *e.g.*, Streeter, *op. cit.*, pp. 150, 152, where the date A.D. 90 is suggested. See now, however, Jean-Paul Audet, *La didachè: instructions des apôtres* (Paris, 1958). On the other hand, Goodspeed as late as 1950 proposed dating it near the middle of the second century. He considered the later section of the *Didache* as being appended to the *Doctrina*, which was probably composed about A.D. 100. See his *Apostolic Fathers*, pp. 3, 9, 285-295.

[62] *Didache*, 15 : 1, 2.

in outlying areas. [63] The situation is made more enigmatical by the fact that Luke, who in Acts 14 : 23 mentions elders in connection with southern Asia Minor and Ephesus, fails to mention them as part of the church organization in Antioch, though he does mention prophets (Acts 13 : 1), a class which also figures prominently in the *Didache* and even bears therein the designation "your high priests." [64] Does such evidence bespeak for Antioch and the Syrian region a direct transition from charismatic to monepiscopal ministry, with the bishop taking over a presidential role at worship formerly allotted to prophets? In this connection, it is of interest to note that Ignatius, who, as we have seen, was a bishop of Antioch, refers to himself as having the prophetic gift. [65]

If the rather obscure statement in the *Didache* should have reference to "bishops" in the monarchical sense and "deacons" as their cultual assistants, it would hardly do, however, to conclude that elders were non-existent in the Syrian region. The most we can say, in view of the combined testimony of Luke and the *Didache*, is that elders may have been relatively less important there than in some other places. (Or were they the "honorable men" referred to in the above quotation? [66]) In any event, it is difficult to assess the testimony of the *Didache*. But regardless of how we interpret this material—as favoring twofold ministry, as evidence of the threefold type,

[63] This is essentially the position taken by Streeter, *op. cit.*, pp. 150, 151. In this case "bishops" in the plural may simply refer to sole bishops in more than one church, an interpretation favored by the cultual context of the statement (see chap. 14).

[64] *Didache*, 13 : 3.

[65] Phld 7 : 1, 2. Of interest, too, are the similarities of emphasis on priests, prophets, the teaching role, etc., in Ignatius and Essene documents, a matter aptly brought to attention by Corwin, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-63, in her analysis of the Judaistic heresy reflected in the Ignatian correspondence.

[66] This possibility, which to me does not seem entirely cogent, would depend, of course, on the validity of the thesis that "elders" was originally (and in Syria at this time) a broad designation including various church functionaries and other venerable persons of the congregation.

or as indication of something else—, it seems clear that by the time Ignatius penned his epistles monepiscopacy had been established in Antioch.

One further question arises: Aside from the Jewish-Christian church in Jerusalem, where some sort of monepiscopal form seems to have come into existence very early, [67] where shall we look for the origin of an order of bishops—Asia or Syria? In view of what we have just said, the *Didache* does not give much help on this matter. In fact, the *relative* abundance of clear contemporary evidence pertaining to Asia in contrast to the small amount of conjectural material available for Syria would be almost sufficient to cause one to favor the former, but a conclusion reached on this basis would have to be highly tentative at best. [68]

V

We may now sum up some of the main results and conclusions emerging from this study: (1) Though organization within any one congregation of the early church may at a given time have been relatively simple, the total organizational pattern itself presents a rather complex picture with a multiplicity of factors being operative with unequal influence, depending on time and place. (2) In broad outline we do, however, receive from the sources contemporary (or most nearly contemporary) with the events a picture of monepiscopacy rather widely established east of the Aegean somewhat earlier than west of it. (3) A similar pattern of development regarding major heretical movements is, to all appearance, so concurrent with the rise of monepiscopacy that undoubtedly

[67] This we have already mentioned. Cf. note 52, above.

[68] For the West we are denied any attempt to reconstruct a pattern of the spread of monepiscopacy, because the paucity of pertinent contemporary material would make such an attempt quite fruitless. There is, however, an interesting "chance notice" from Hegesippus which Eusebius, *H.E.*, iv. 22. 2, 3, has preserved: On his way to Rome during the time of Pius, Hegesippus stopped at Corinth, where Primus was "bishop."

the danger from the heresies was one of the main immediate causes for the church's adoption of monepiscopal organization in both East and West. (4) The choice of this organizational form seems also to have depended, however, on background factors which were at first more congenial to the East than to the West. (5) In view of Roman respect for republican institutions during the early Principate, it is not improbable that the organization of the Roman church was influenced strongly by the concept of collegiality—perhaps even dual collegiality, either as a modified episcopate (co-bishops assisted by elders) or a modified presbyterate (co-chairmen of a board of elders). (6) Whatever kind of collegiality it was, dual or not, it gave way more slowly to the idea of monepiscopacy than was the case in the East, where thought patterns had been conditioned to one-man leadership by a long background of monarchal political institutions. (7) The precise sequence in which the developments took place at specific places within East and West is impossible to determine, but in the East there is evidence which might lead us to the highly tentative conclusion that the province of Asia preceded Syria in fairly widescale institution of the monarchical episcopate. (9) This early monepiscopacy was a relatively simple, but strong, form of church government useful to meet the needs of the second century, and we should interpret it as such rather than seeking to read back into it the more highly developed type of episcopacy of a later period.

Obviously, our brief presentation has had to place to one side many important and interesting details, but it is hoped that this look in broad sweep may be useful in adding one more perspective to the many which have already been suggested in the quest for solution of a significant, but extremely puzzling, question. Finally, it is emphasized that results and conclusions indicated herein are tentative.